

Community Forest Management (A study of Investing in Communities for Sustainable Forests through CFM)

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ABSTRACT

Conservation and development of forest resources has implications not only for the economy but also for the environment worldwide. In many nations, rates of deforestation and forest degradation are high, raising concerns about the loss of ecosystem services. Depletion and degradation of forest resources lead to serious wider environmental consequences. Community can play very vital role in resource management and is an integral part of sustainable resource management. The history of forest conservation in India is the best example of community's participation in resource conservation. In India, forest dwelling tribal communities, villagers used to protect the forest as their survival was dependent on it. Forest resources are intricately related to the livelihoods of local communities in view of their co-existence for centuries. The current study discusses and analyses the Investing in Communities for Sustainable Forests through CFM) in the current scenario, as well as processes related to the existing condition, people's dependence, and circumstances that led to the evolution of community forestry in India.

Introduction:

There are concerns about the loss of ecosystem services as a result of the high rates of deforestation and forest degradation in many countries. The preservation and development of forest resources affects the global environment as well as the economics of a nation. As a result of their long-term coexistence, forest resources are inextricably linked to local inhabitants' means of subsistence.

Community is a key component of sustainable resource management and can play a very important role in resource management. The best illustration of community involvement in resource conservation is the history of forest conservation in India. In India, people and tribal groups that lived in the forest used to guard the forest since it was essential to their life.

The government and numerous sponsors started to take notice of how local communities in India were managing their forests and natural resources in the late nineteenth century. Community forests and forestry today occupy a key place in national politics due to their importance for state finances, environmental preservation, and rural lives. The sector has occasionally been promoted and developed while taking political and community interests into mind through the implementation of various programmes and strategies. Despite the fact that most of the projects had successful outcomes, several of them did not.

The "Vana Samrakshana Samithies" (CFM) programme is upgrading the joint forest management (JFM) policy in AP. Compared to JFM, which involved collaboration between those who depend on the forest and the Forest Department, CFM claims to be a more democratic process. A special emphasis will be placed on important enabling issues including empowering women and other vulnerable groups,

training and capacity building, and reducing poverty through skill development and income-generating activities.

Forests in Andhra Pradesh

There were 23 districts in Andhra Pradesh (AP) until it was divided into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in 2014. There are currently four districts in Rayalaseema and nine districts in coastal Andhra; the remaining ten districts make up the Telangana state. There are 84,580,777 people living in Residuary AP, and 27.39 lakh (5.53%) of them are tribal. The state's notified forest cover covers 36,914.77 sq. km., or 22.73 percent, of the overall land area. With a total size of 8,137.08 sq. km, the State is home to 16 protected areas, including three national parks, 13 wildlife sanctuaries, and one tiger reserve. Scrubs or open woods make up over two-thirds of the forests in AP.

In the northern region of the state, 4 districts that are primarily tribal contain the majority of the state's forested areas. Tribal communities have historically relied on forests for their livelihoods, using them for both farming and gathering forest products. A common form of shifting farming known as podu is practised by tribal people in upland forests.

Joint Forest Management

Despite the best efforts of the government, unlawful harvesting and unchecked cutting caused India's forests to deteriorate for decades. India began experimenting with joint forest management (JFM) about 30 years ago in an effort to combat this situation. JFM today includes more than 100,000 village-based user groups and over one-third of India's national forest land across 27 states.

JFM is an initiative that encourages participation from the public in order to protect, conserve, and restore forests while preserving the rights of forest residents. To ensure their participation in JFM, women and other underprivileged groups

of the community must be empowered. Aggarwal and Chauhan(2015).

Community forest management (CFM), which boosts local organisations' capacity and makes investments in the productivity of forests, is the goal of JFM's evolution. In CFM, local governments design a management and business plan that has been approved that covers marketing, forestry management, and the production of goods and services derived from forests.

Declining productivities of interconnected natural resources like land, water, and grasslands are being felt as a result of degradation. Since regional issues are of particular significance, this article focuses on Andhra Pradesh's forest policies and management in the hopes that better understanding may result in better policy creation and fieldwork. Sustainable development will remain a pipe dream until concrete efforts are taken to stop the degradation.

Community Forest Management

The establishment of "Vana Samrakshana Samithies" or Community Forest Management (CFM), which seeks to improve the actions taken under JFM, was made possible by the World Bank's assistance for JFM. Although CFM claims to be a more democratic approach due to the decentralisation and delegation of the decision-making process, JFM has been a cooperation between communities who depend on forests and the Forest Department.

The purpose of community and farm forestry programmes (CFM) is to enhance the quality of life for communities that depend on forests. Small-scale forest farmers and landless residents in forested areas are the main benefactors. CFM seeks to advance participatory methods of cooperative forest management and bolster local leadership. in 2001 (Papia Roy).

Community woods are governed under the Van Panchayats Act, which combines governmental ownership and local control. It is the method by which forest delineation is accomplished that matters, not physically enclosing the forest with obstacles. A strategy to reduce rising deforestation and forest degradation is community forest management. By generating rural employment, it also provides the side-benefits of alleviating poverty and addressing social marginalisation.

Community involvement is the same as community participation when referring to community-based forest conservation. Giving the community specific tasks and responsibilities in maintaining the designated area of forest is community involvement. According to this perspective, community engagement implies community involvement in the management and upkeep of the forest area.

A series of supporting developments, such as the liberalisation of NTFP and the reduction of FCA's restrictions on VSS's cultivation of medicinal plants, provide the legal foundation for CFM. In addition, focus will be paid to key enabling concerns like reducing poverty through skill development and income-generating activities, training and capacity building, and empowering women and other vulnerable groups.

Investing in Communities for Sustainable Forests

CFM is being tested by the Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project (APCFMP). The

project has contributed to an increase in the state's dense forest area from 10,302 km² to 15,396 km². A 5,571 km² reduction in unproductive scrub woodland could be advantageous to local communities and national conservation initiatives.

More than 350,000 hectares of new forest assets that are now being managed by (VSS) community groups will produce sustainable timber. Revenues should rise as a result of improved output of forest bamboo for poles, eucalyptus for pulpwood, and teak harvesting for lumber. Community forest enterprises are finding that non-timber forest products (NTFP), such as leaf plates, medicinal plants, vermicomposting and bamboo products, are a significant source of sustainable revenue.

Value-added goods are still a relatively new concept in the project area, but they are currently supported by partnerships with NGOs, businesses in the private sector, and applied research and development. Before being sold, a number of forest products now undergo further processing. Ecotourism with a focus on the local community is being developed in a few locations with appealing natural features and significant business possibilities. Bird watching, wildlife viewing, adventure travel, and educational programmes are among the activities available. There are additional programmes for participatory conservation, photography, and local cultural activities available.

When sizable tracts of bamboo and eucalyptus plantations become harvestable starting in 2010, forest earnings will rise significantly. According to the project's developers, revenue from ecotourism and non-timber forest products is also anticipated to rise.

Bamboo, the Poor Man's Timber

A significant source of raw materials for many finished goods is bamboo. 10% of India's bamboo production comes from Andhra Pradesh. Large areas of degraded bamboo forests have been restored by the initiative using kinds that grow quickly. It intends to establish brand-new plantations that local communities will sustainably manage. Bamboo culms are offered as green material or add value to conventional goods like carpets and bedding thanks to good management, which includes sustainable extraction techniques.

From Bamboo Stick to Incense Stick.

To ensure a steady supply of agarbattis, the project has ties to both nearby and far-off markets. The informal structure of the common enterprise groups (CEGs) allows for working hours for women who have regular household tasks to attend.

Agarbatti businesses affected 15,694 homes through 816 VSSs, bringing in a total of Rs. 17 million each year in 2007–08. The female team members make about Rs.11/kg.

Plywood that is too thin can be replaced with bamboo mat boards. They can be utilised in building, furniture, packing boxes, roofing, and dividing walls. Traditional mat weaving in tribal regions has been revived thanks to this innovative application.

More and more VSS villages are maintaining their forests entirely on their own, with professional assistance from the Forest Department. An excellent example of this new kind

of community-led forest management (CFM) concept is the Dubagunta VSS in the Nellore District.

Adda Leaf Plates

Adda leaves are produced by a large creeping plant called camel's foot climber. When the leaves are in season, tribal women can spend up to seven hours a day gathering them. The product's worth is increased by certain indigenous women who shabbily sew the leaves into plates.

Community Based Ecotourism

14 VSSs were able to build ecotourism facilities thanks to the project. According to the indigenous flora and wildlife, each location offers a different range of amenities. This type of sustainable use makes use of local expertise, generates substantial local income, and inspires communities to respect wildlife.

Meeting the Challenge of Market Access

Forest goods produced by communities can be sold in a variety of ways. The majority of markets are found by word of mouth, informal routes, and local traders. The current investment focus of APCFMP is to enhance production procedures in order to overcome this difficulty. Additionally, the project pushes producers to diversify their offerings and choose a variety of customers. To provide the best prices for its member CEGs and VSSs, the CFCs engage in price negotiations with both buyers and sellers. By directing applied research toward community needs through 14 new Technology Dissemination Centers, the Forest Department has additionally aided communities.

Over 5,000 VSSs, the community has generated over Rs.974 million in revenue thus far, with 1,000 of the most institutionally robust VSS accounting for the majority of that number. Annual revenues ought to rise greatly as the forest base's productivity keeps rising. Where appropriate, connections between the public and private sectors ought to be enhanced.

Improved market accessibility for specific timber products could be advantageous for VSS sites. Communities require strong relationships between VSS organisations, marketing organisations, and consumers. Institutions in the public and private sectors of finance must assist in establishing these ties. The creation of a learning and information repository that gathers, arranges, and distributes lessons will be crucial.

Concerns and issues

Lack of Local Management Planning, Although VSS are supposedly entitled to all NTFPs, due to the GCCs monopoly VSSs are still expected to get NTFP permits from the DFO.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is evident that any endeavour to conserve and enhance forest resources can be assessed in light of the local inhabitants' livelihood concerns. As a result, governments came to understand how significant it is to involve the local community in the preservation of forest resources. To have a comprehensive grasp of the function of community management programmes in protecting forest resources in this environment, it becomes important to discuss the nature and extent of notions like forest resources, community, and community involvement.

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